

## **AB 221 (Santiago, Chiu, R. Rivas, S. Rubio)**

### **Emergency Food Assistance for All**

#### **Bill Summary**

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AB 221 would provide emergency food assistance to millions of low-income Californians during COVID-19. This bill would also require the State Department of Social Services (CDSS) to provide recommendations for a permanent food assistance program.

#### **Existing Law**

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Federal law establishes the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), known in California as CalFresh, to provide low-income Americans with assistance to purchase nutritional foods (7 U.S. Code Section 2011).

Federal law establishes the Pandemic EBT (P-EBT) Act of 2020 to provide food assistance for eligible children during periods of school closure due to a public health emergency (Public Law 116-127; 7 U.S.C. 2011).

State law establishes the CalFresh program (federally funded) to provide monthly food benefits to low-income individuals and families (Welfare and Institutions Code Section 18900.2.).

#### **Background**

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COVID-19 has devastated California's economy, leading to high levels of unemployment and food insecurity. Since the beginning of the pandemic, over 7 million Californians have applied for unemployment insurance and as of early January 2021, 2.8 million Californians were receiving regular unemployment benefits. Many struggle to pay for rent, mortgages, food and other basic necessities. These burdens are disproportionately affecting various groups across the state, including Black and Latinx communities.

As of January 18, 2021, for example, 22.5% of California households were experiencing food insecurity, with an even higher rate of 27.8% for households with children. Rates of food insecurity are even worse when examining data by race, with 24.4% of Black households and 33.1% of Latinx households reporting some levels of food insecurity. These numbers are even more staggering for households with children: 33.8% of Black families and 38.1% of Latinx families are facing hunger.

In March 2020, the federal government issued P-EBT, granting eligible low-income households a one-time allotment of \$250 to \$400 per child to spend on groceries. Eligible families in California received P-EBT cards from March-June of 2020 and received an extension in August and September of 2020. Research suggests that P-EBT reduced food hardship amongst the lowest income children by 30% percent in the week following its distribution.

#### **Need for AB 221**

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Despite the federal government providing one-time P-EBT assistance and the state offering limited assistance via CalFresh, millions of families continue to need emergency food assistance, including our undocumented communities who are excluded from CalFresh and other social safety nets. As the pandemic evolves, it is imperative we support families, children and single individuals by providing food assistance during this crisis.

AB 221 would provide emergency food assistance to low-income families, regardless of their legal status. This bill would also require CDSS to conduct a study to make

recommendations on how to establish a permanent food assistance program that is available to all food-insecure Californians.

California must aid its communities through the challenges brought forth by the COVID-19 crisis and ensure basic human necessities are accessible by all its residents. AB 221 would address the current overwhelming rates of food insecurity and prevent more Californians from falling into poverty or homelessness.

### **Support**

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California Association of Food Banks

(Co-sponsor)

Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights

(Co-sponsor)

Western Center on Law & Poverty

(Co-sponsor)

### **Opposition**

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None on file.

### **For More Information**

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